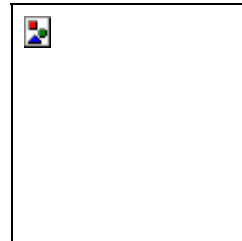


BASIC FACTS ABOUT DRUGS: ECSTASY

What is Ecstasy?

Ecstasy is one of the most dangerous drugs threatening young people today. Called MDMA (3-4-Methylenedioxymethamphetamine) by scientists, it is a synthetic chemical that can be derived from an essential oil of the sassafras tree. MDMA is also one of the easiest illegal drugs to obtain. Its effects are similar to those of amphetamines and hallucinogens. Distributed almost anywhere, it has become very popular at social events like raves, hip hop parties, concerts, etc. frequented by both adults and youth. While not all “event” attendees use Ecstasy, the drug often makes the circuit of these parties and can set up dangerous circumstances that can affect everyone there.

- Street Names: E, Adam, Roll, Bean, X and XTC
- Clarity, Essence, Stacy, Lover’s Speed, Eve
- Form: Pills - usually white, yellow or brown
- Size, shape and design vary
- Pills are often branded with designer symbols



Legal or Not?

First developed as an appetite suppressant in 1914, MDMA was used as a psychotherapeutic tool and also started to become available on the street in the late '70s and early '80s. It wasn't until 1985 that Ecstasy was made illegal. It is classified as a “Schedule 1” controlled substance along with other narcotics like heroin, cocaine, and LSD. Penalties for possession, delivery, and manufacturing of the drug can include fines as high as \$100,000 and up to 99 years or life in prison, depending on the amount seized.

Dangerous Impurities

One reason Ecstasy can be especially dangerous is the lack of content control. Ingredients are hard to get and manufacturers of the drug often use substitutes, mixing other harmful additives with the already dangerous mix. This practice is so common that “drug test kits” are often sold with the drug so users can test for purity. Because of the uncertainties about the drug sources, pharmacological agents, chemicals used to manufacture them, and possible contaminants, it is difficult to measure the toxicity, consequences and symptoms that might be expected.

How is it Used?

Ecstasy is usually taken in pill form and swallowed and it can also be injected. Some users have been known to crush and snort the resulting powder. Others insert the pill into the anus where it is absorbed. This process is known as "shafting."

How Does It Affect You?

Ecstasy is similar (in nature) to other amphetamines and hallucinogens. It speeds up the nervous system and acts as a mood enhancer. Also referred to as "the love drug", Ecstasy often makes the user feel good, happy and relaxed - at least at first. Contrary to rumors, Ecstasy is not an aphrodisiac and can actually inhibit sexual performance.

The taking of any drug affects people differently. Depending on size, weight, health, dosage and other drugs being used, the reaction can be mild or very severe. Anyone suffering from hypertension, heart disease, diabetes, epilepsy, mental illness or panic should avoid taking Ecstasy.

Common Side Effects

The following effects start within 20 minutes of taking E and can last for 4 - 6 hours or longer:

- Increased heart rate
- Increased body temperature
- Increased blood pressure
- Increased confidence
- Nausea
- Anxiety
- Feelings of well-being (happiness, love)
- Sweating
- Loss of appetite

Other Reported Effects

Taking higher doses of MDMA will not increase the good feelings. In fact higher dosages can cause convulsions, irrational behavior, and hallucinations. Users have reported having problems with insomnia, anxiety, paranoia, concentration and depression after taking the drug.

Overdose

Taking too much Ecstasy can result in:

- Extremely high body temperatures
- High blood pressure
- Hallucinations

- Fast Heartbeat
- Breathing problems
- Death

Death often results from harmful overheating (**hyperthermia**), or from drinking too much at one time (**hyponatremia**). Hyponatremia is a condition where excess fluid intake swells the brain resulting in coma. A third cause of death is **stimulation**. Over stimulation of the nervous system can result in heart attack or brain hemorrhage.

Warning Signs of Overdose

- Feeling hot or unwell
- Becoming confused, not able to talk properly
- Headache
- Vomiting
- Not Sweating
- Racing heart or pulse when resting
- Fainting or collapsing
- Loss of control over body movements
- Tremors
- Problems Urinating

Duration of Effects

An Ecstasy high can last from six to 24 hours but usually averages three to four hours. Some reactions have been reported to persist from one to 14 days after use.

Short Term Effects

Short-term effects include psychological difficulties (confusion, depression, sleep problems, craving, severe anxiety, and paranoia). These effects occur during use and can continue even weeks after use. Physical problems that can occur are muscle tension, involuntary teeth clenching, nausea, blurred vision, rapid eye movement, fever, chills or sweating.

Long Term Effects

Recent findings connect use of Ecstasy to memory loss. Use of Ecstasy depletes **serotonin**, a very important chemical in the brain which regulates mood, sleeping and eating habits, as well as, the thinking and behavior process, sexual function, and sensitivity to pain.

Herbal Ecstasy

Herbal Ecstasy is another form of MDMA that is composed of ephedrine (ma huang) or pseudoephedrine and caffeine from the kola nut. Also sold in tablet form, Herbal Ecstasy can cause permanent brain damage and death. Though not currently classified as a controlled substance, Herbal Ecstasy shares many of the same qualities and effects as MDMA. Also known as Cloud 9, Herbal Bliss, Ritual Spirit, Herbal X, GWM, Rave Energy, Ultimate Xphoria and X.

Drug Testing

Ecstasy can be detected up to four days in the urine.

Ecstasy and Anti-Depressants

People currently taking an MAOI should not use Ecstasy. MAOIs are most commonly found in prescription anti-depressants Nardil (phenelzine), Parnete (tranylcypromine), Marplan (isocarboxazid), Eldepryl (I-deprenyl), and Aurorex or Manerix (moclobemide). The same is true of the protease inhibitor Ritonavir.

Ecstasy and Pregnancy

In a study published in the May 1, 2001 issue of the Journal of Neuroscience, results showed that exposure (of rats) to Ecstasy caused memory and learning deficiencies to the unborn rat. As with all other drugs (legal or not), they should never be taken during pregnancy unless specifically prescribed by a medical professional.

Sources

ACDE is grateful to the following web sites for their contributions in preparing this fact sheet:

National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information - www.health.org

National Institute on Drug Abuse - www.nida.nih.gov

Partnership for A Drug Free America - www.drugfreeamerica.org

Texas Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse - www.tcada.state.tx.us

University of Maryland - Ecstasy Facts - <http://www.ecstasyfacts.org/>